

DEFENSE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

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“The Content of Our Character”: Value Differences in the Narrative Comments of Navy Officer Fitness Reports

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ABSTRACT

As an extended analysis of Thomas, Edwards, Perry, & David's (1998) content analysis of Navy officer fitness reports, this investigation explored the relationship between the written comments and promotion recommendations. In the earlier study, Thomas et al. identified racial differences in the descriptors more often ascribed to black officers and those more often ascribed to white officers. Their data were used in the present analysis to determine if the differences reflected subtle (if unintended) racial bias. The findings revealed that certain of the character-related descriptors were more likely to be associated with an “early” promotion recommendation, whereas other descriptors were more likely to be associated with the “regular” or “no” promotion recommendations. Importantly, the descriptors associated with early promotion were more often ascribed to white officers, while the descriptors associated with the lesser promotion recommendations were more often ascribed to black officers. Implications for these findings are discussed.

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